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January 15, 2007

Chairman Sinrud, Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

I speak in support of House Bill 78. I would like to thank Representative Parker for his efforts on behalf of the treatment courts of Montana and their participants.

I am a district court standing master in the Fourth Judicial District (Missoula and Mineral Counties) and I have been involved in the establishment and development of both the Missoula Youth Drug Court and the Missoula Mental Health Court Docket. I appear today as a private citizen on my own behalf.

The Missoula Youth Drug Court, established in 1996, was the first treatment court in Montana. Since 1996 at least 15 state and tribal treatment courts have begun operation. Several years ago, with the assistance of the court administrator's office, an informal treatment court coalition was formed. We meet monthly, mostly by videoconference and annually in person. House Bill 78 would take our efforts of coordination, mutual assistance and training, a large step forward.

House Bill 78 would also provide much-needed funding for treatment courts. Most of the treatment courts in Montana were begun with federal funding from the U.S. Department of Justice. Federal funding for treatment courts has been drastically reduced in the past few years.

As you may know, treatment courts had their beginnings in Miami in the mid- 1980s as a response to the crack epidemic. In short, criminal justice officials there found both that they were running out of jail and prison space and that the outcomes of incarceration were not good with respect to reduction in drug use. Due to the frequent connection between drug abuse and criminal activity, they looked for another way to increase public safety. This sparked the idea of closely monitored, court-directed, long-term (generally about one year) outpatient treatment for those charged with crimes with serious drug or alcohol addictions. The idea has spread and been adapted. We now have a number of treatment court models including mental health courts, domestic violence court, family treatment courts and of course, adult and juvenile drug courts. A mental health court is designed to divert individuals with serious mental illness charged with misdemeanors or non-violent felonies into treatment.

While still relatively new, treatment courts have shown positive outcomes both nationally and locally both in reduction of crime and drug use while in the court and in recidivism following completion of the court program.

Finally, I recommend that the phrase "drug treatment court" be amended in the bill to treatment court so as to make it clear that the bill's provision include juvenile drug courts, mental health courts, family drug courts and adult drug courts.

Thank you very much.